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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program of regular consultation with teachers at two elementary schools by an interning school psychologist. Teachers signed up for the consultation on a voluntary basis. Results indicate that student-clients significantly improved after their teachers participated in the consultation program. How the consultation model was organized, conducted, and evaluated is presented. The themes of the sessions and school differences are discussed. (Author/HMV)

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An Intern Tries Consultation

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While individual assessment of children is still felt to be the main role and function of school psychologists, it is increasingly recognized that the school psychologist's almost exclusive persistence in this function has not always been from a position of preference, but of necessity. Either because the school psychologist's caseload is too vast, the pupil-psychologist ratio too great, the power organization in the school system too static, the resistance to change in the school-community too rigid, or the school psychologist's training too limited, the school psychologist in most school systems continues to hide behind his test kits, seeing children briefly, parents on occasion, and teachers almost never. How convenient these set of circumstances are to the school psychologist unsure of his effectiveness to remediate children's psycho-educational problems and complacent to write meaningless psychological reports "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". Mention teacher in-service programs, special education development and supervision, group testing procedures, long range school plans, school-community relations, parent groups, community mental health-school cooperation, and the reporting, evaluating, or conducting of research, and the typical school psychologist smiles with defensive naivete implying these are "ivory tower" roles under which school systems will not permit them to function. What a superficial facade for the school psychologist's complacent acquiescence to a more ingrained, less threatening, but significantly less effective, psychometric role!

Go one step further and suggest to these same school psychologists that they consult directly with teachers regarding problems they are having with individual children (no testing, no parent conferences, and no pupil observation) and their stopwatches slip through perspiring palms, shattering all hopes and dreams of a "nice, easy job". And if you dare, point out that such consultation might inevitably lead to consultation regarding personal teacher problems, teacher-teacher, or

teacher-principal interpersonal problems, along with administrative personal, interpersonal, program and curriculum problems, and I am certain your job description of a school psychologist will sound completely foreign to ears oversatiated by standardized instructions of test manuals.

Mindful of these feelings, aware that at least one special project was required by Temple University for its doctoral internship students, as well as hopeful of broadening my role and effectiveness as a school psychologist, not to mention the value of the learning experience, I ventured forth during my internship year (1971-1972) into such psycho-educational consultation in the North Penn School District, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

I was advised by my Temple intern supervisor, Dr. X. to choose only one school, at the most two, in this district of 17 schools, some 12,000 pupils, in which to incorporate the consultation project. It was further suggested that the basic criterion for school selection was to include a staff with positive feelings toward school psychology and pupil personnel services, i.e., a school whose problems and problem children were few. Use of such a selection criterion was based on the possibility that consultation success would be more likely in such settings and success would "sell" the consultation model to other schools, other districts, and to myself. The logic was irrefutable.

Having had the opportunity of already working a year and a half (part time) in the school system in which I was interning, it was not difficult to find a school which met the criterion; but my district experience made me also cognizant of one particular school with many problems and consequently, was in more dire need of help. My district employers, who, by the way, already had a full time job waiting for me after the internship, also were hopeful I could incorporate this model in the multi-problem school. This being the case, I decided to forego in part the aforementioned logic and advice of my Temple supervisor concerning consultation school

selection. I chose one school with a great many inter-related problems--hereafter called School A--and one with very few--School B. My supervisor did not agree entirely with my decision, but went along with it nevertheless.

Both schools selected serve a predominantly (99%) white, middle class population. School A had a slightly greater proportion of lower class children as a large trailer park exists within its boundaries. School A had 27 teachers serving 600 children; School B had 21 teachers and 425 pupils.

It was also decided that such consultation would consist of a half-day at each school every week. On the same day, both schools would be serviced, one in the morning, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., the other in the afternoon, 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Every month, the morning and afternoon schedule was to be reversed for the two schools. In this way, teacher breaks throughout the day would be balanced in the two schools. A sign-up sheet was to be posted in each school office for teachers to request, on a completely voluntary basis, a time slot (usually a half hour) with the intern consultant, naturally dependent on breaks in the individual teacher's schedule. If necessary, coverage of their classes was to be obtained. A room in each school for consultation was to be arranged.

The consultation was to consist in the main of client-centered ("client" referring to "student") case conferences, emphasizing the pupil's problem. No testing, parent conferences, or student individual and group counseling were to occur. Pupil observation was to be held to a minimum. A successful treatment plan for the child's particular difficulty in class was to be the specific goal of the sessions. Lacking extensive experience in such consultation (as well as confidence), I planned to initially spend the first session with the teacher determining the exact nature of the problem as she saw it, followed a week later by a "feedback" consultation session, outlining the remedial program. A week's interim allowed for more detailed, comprehensive recommendations, heightening the likelihood of success felt to be so absolutely necessary in employing the consultation model--especially during its initial stages.

With such a procedure, it was necessary to record the substance of each conference held. To accomplish this, a summary paragraph was written after each session. These summaries also enabled an analysis to be conducted concerning the types of problems (Appendix B) discussed. A written copy of the recommendations was presented to the teacher following the feedback, a carbon copy of which was to be added to the summary paragraph of the preceding week.

Continuous follow-up of individual cases was planned, assuming the same teachers voluntarily requested further consultation. A more formal evaluation of the consultation project was planned for later. Near the end of the school year, teachers rated the children (Appendix A) depending on their progress since consultation occurred.

In any case, after such procedural planning was established, administrative approval from the intern consultant's immediate school district supervisor, the Director of Elementary Education, was obtained. Appointments were made with the two building principals to explain the consultation project, answer questions, and discuss possible problems. Both principals appeared delighted, both offered space, agreed to cover teacher classes if necessary, and in general, were willing to cooperate in any way possible to get the program started. It was felt, however, that one principal (School B) perceived the consultation model as adding to an already successful program; the other, hoping it would help solve the many problems present.

A conference with both school guidance counselors in the presence of their principals next took place. Since the consultation model was in reality usurping part of the normal role and function of the elementary school counselor in the North Penn District, a clear understanding of the intern consultant's function was necessary. Both counselors, as did their principals, welcomed help in relieving their already overburdened case load; they voiced no misgivings that the teachers would have a <u>choice</u> between consulting the regular school counselor and the psychologist. Because the intern consultant was to do no counseling with students

or parents, the overlap between the counselor and intern consultant's role was felt to be minimal. It was made clear that the intern consultant could service the counselor, or for that matter, the principal, nurse, or any other ancilliary school personnel, in addition to teachers, upon voluntary request. Throughout, emphasis was placed on the client-centered consultation model for these various consultees, as it was felt such a model presentation would be the least threatening in gaining administrative approval. The intern consultant expected, however, that successful case consultation would inevitably lead to consultation regarding other school related problems, especially at the more troubled School A.

The intern consultant next met with the entire staff at both schools in order to introduce the consultation project to the teachers. Once again, in order to be as non-threatening as possible, the service was described in terms of pupil, not teacher problems. Lofty goals were not promised; in its stead was a concerted, comprehensive effort to help. Both school faculties responded enthusiastically, several teachers indicating they had "business" for the intern consultant already.

Finally on October 28, 1971, approximately five weeks after school started, consultation began. Except for holidays, the weekly session went on uninterrupted through April 20, 1972. On April 25, 1972, the follow-up assessment was made. The rating system (Appendix A) was sent to each teacher consultee, one for each student-client that was discussed in any of the sessions. In total, 20 teachers (42%) with 38 different student-clients comprised the follow-up.

By May 12, 100% of the 38 forms were returned. Table I reports the frequency and percentage for each of the five possible outcomes, reported separately for each school and combined for both.

Table I

Frequency and Percentage of Changes in Original Problem Behavior Among 38 Teacher-Consultee, Student-Client Consultations

Status Change	School A	School B	Total
Problem Considerably Worse	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Problem Slightly Worse	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
No Change	1 (9%)	6 (22%)	7 (18%)
Slight Improvement Noted	7 (64%)	10 (37%)	17 (45%)
Definite Improvement Noted	3 (27%)	11 (41%)	14 (37%)
Total	11 (100%)	27 (100%)	38 (100%)

Strikingly clear is the fact that no child's problem behavior about which any teacher sought and received consultation became worse in the teacher's eyes. Indeed, for both schools, as reported by their teachers, 82% showed some kind of improvement (45% "slight", 37% "definite") with 18% demonstrating "no change".

Pooling the data from both schools, Table II illustrates the actual and expected differences for the five status categories.

Table II

Actual and Expected Frequencies of Five Status Categories of Student-Client Problem Behavior*

Category	Frequency	
	Actual	Expected
1	0	7.4
2	0	7.4
3	7	7.4
4	17	7.4
5	14	7.4

* $x^2 = 56.77$, $p < .01$

Utilizing the chi square statistic in this instance, I have assumed that the "expected" frequency in each category would be randomly equal (hence "7.4"), an assumption open to question, but knowledge of what to "expect" in each category is unclear. The chi square was applied despite this uncertainty, and the highly

significant result lends credence to the conclusion that chance alone could not have accounted for the positive change in the student-clients' problem behavior.

A shortcoming observed is that the procedure employed to measure the effectiveness of the consultant's intervention is dependent on the objectivity of the teacher. No cross validation of her appraisal of the student was done, and the results obtained are open to question on that point. In addition, this research procedure implies, but doesn't prove, a causal relationship between consultation and behavior improvement. Nevertheless, the data supports an overall highly positive appraisal of the effectiveness of psychological consultation as a means of changing educational problems of children, at least for the voluntary teacher consultees and their student-clients in this project. If similar consultation had occurred in six other schools (three more days a week), it is conceivable that over 100 student-client (not to mention teacher-client) cases could have been handled, far exceeding the amount of full evaluations that could have been handled in an equivalent period of time.

Furthermore, the literature has shown that the image of the school psychologist is directly related to the amount of direct contact he has with teachers. Therefore, the model is to be admired for the amount of personal contact generated between teacher and psychologist.

Among the 15 Themes Found in Consultation Sessions (Appendix B), Table III reports the frequency of each theme. More than one theme could have been recorded for each session.

Table III

Frequency of Themes in Consultation Sessions for Each School, and Both Schools Combined

Theme	School A	School B	Total
1. Support	4	5	9
2. Acting-Out Children - Teacher Intolerance	5	3	8
3. Parental Neglect	1	3	4
4. Underachievement	0	7	7
5. Role Threat	3	0	3
6. Interpretation of Behavior	6	15	21
7. Intelligence	0	5	5
8. Children Who "Do Not Mind"	5	3	8
9. Teacher Emotional Problem	0	0	0
10. Withdrawn	1	3	4
11. Underdog	0	1	1
12. Broken Home	2	0	2
13. Conflict with Administration	7	0	7
14. Advice on Teacher Problems	2	1	3
15. Teacher Effectiveness	4	1	5

Themes 5, 13, 14, and 15 generally concern themselves with inter- and intra-staff problems, where the teacher herself, already the "consultee" becomes the "client". School A had 16 such consultation sessions, as opposed to two from B. On the other hand, problems involving academic performance (Themes 4 and 7) appeared to be of more concern at School B; behavior problems (Themes 2 and 8) were more prevalent at School A. These differences between the two schools are congruent with initial impressions already pointed out. However, in no instance at either school did a teacher's personal emotional problem present itself as a consultation theme.

At School A, a larger variety of consultation themes abounded. A few teachers requested help concerning management problems for the class as a whole, and thus the teacher's entire class was technically the "client". Others concerned themselves with consultee-centered consultation dealing with professional style and problems with staff interaction. Conflicts between faculty and administration were directly or indirectly present at School A only. At both schools, most consultation sessions were planned a week in advance, especially in the beginning; others were arranged on a "short term" basis and a few were "unplanned", arranged the day of consultation.

A trend in the latter informal arrangement seemed to occur more frequently as the year progressed. All consultations with the building principals were of such an "unplanned" nature.

In any case, helping teachers understand what particular need was being expressed by a student's observable behavior (Theme 6) accounted for the highest theme frequency. It seemed that once a student's behavior is more objectively viewed by the teacher, it can be more readily redirected or changed.

In retrospect, the consultation project was felt to have been both an enjoyable and successful internship experience. The amount of children helped, the teacher-psychologist rapport established, and the evaluative data all support this conclusion. Comments from teachers, principals, and counselors had also been favorable. The experience has enabled this intern to feel comfortable (and competent) in offering teachers advice without tests, developmental, and social data. Certainly, consultation is an exciting, challenging, risky, but worthwhile, endeavor that adequately trained school psychologists should build into their working program. If not, they have only themselves to blame when they complain of their endless lists of referrals. The psychodiagnostic model is a very important aspect of the school psychologist's role and function. But, exclusive reliance on this role alone tends to minimize the effectiveness a well trained school psychologist can have on the increasingly complex school systems of the 70's, criticized for its dehumanizing qualities and poor personal contacts at all levels.

As a result of my consultation experience, this intern bought the consultation model and has helped others to see it also. In years to come, "sales" should increase, especially if problems in the psychoeducational economy continue to rise.

scf
1/29/74

Date:

Dear _____:

I have consulted with you concerning _____ because of

_____

_____

_____.

Please circle below any change in the original problem behavior and return to me at your earliest convenience. Your complete candidness is requested.

(1) problem considerably worse

(2) problem slightly worse

(3) no change

(4) slight improvement noted

(5) definite improvement noted

Thank you.

Barry Chasen, M.A.
School Psychologist

Return to: Office of Pupil Services
Penndale Junior High School

Themes Found in Consultation Sessions

1. Teacher asking for support of consultant to carry out a decision already arrived at; i.e., transfer a child.

2. Acting-out or disruptive children--theme here is children who fight with other children, do not keep in line, push, etc. It is related to the teacher's inability to tolerate any acting-out behavior. It is different from children who straight do not mind the teacher.

3. Parental neglect--here include such things as a working mother whom the teacher believes "should be at home with her children"; also parents who ignore or do not immediately heed communications from the teacher. Included here also are parents who do not seem interested in their children's progress.

4. Underachieving children--include here children who "have the ability but will not try". Also children who will not go to college or are not motivated in the middle-class achievement ethnic. The theme is generally a discrepancy between ability and achievement. Note: This is not a lack of emotion.

5. Role threat to consultee. This can be a teacher, principal, janitor, P.E. instructor, special education instructor, etc.

6. The teacher is saying--I'm not sure what this behavior means--please help me understand and resolve my own uncertainties.

7. The problem of intelligence--inability to adequately accommodate children whose intelligence is below average but not in the retarded range.

8. Children who do not "mind". These children are essentially disciplinary problems who do not obey the teacher's orders.

9. Use of consultant for own psychiatric or emotional problems--the presenting of the problem of the client soon is lost in the teacher's presentation of own problems, overtly or covertly.

10. Withdrawn child or social isolate--this reflects teacher's concern with a child that "cannot be reached".

11. Concern with "underdog" or social misfits--need to be needed on part of teacher; goes beyond appropriate role in "helping".

12. Broken home--the consultee seems to reflect that the child's home background, i.e., divorce, separation, has something to do with the presenting problem.

13. Conflict with school authorities--the theme is one in which the teacher indicates disagreement with the school principal, school philosophy, etc.

14. Use of consultant for advice. This includes adjustment, efficiency rating, how to dump one, etc.

15. Teacher concerned about role, mostly because she is new--uses specifics which are rather simply solved to indicate general anxiety about effectiveness as a teacher.